**Thinking Outside the Box (While Loving the Box)**
**September 12, 2022**

Last week, I began sharing about my understanding of Christian formation as both classroom learning and individual study and as action in service and witness. One of my examples was the effect eleven years of seminary teaching had on my formation/growth as a Christian.

After earning a Th.D. (doctor of theology, seminary version of a Ph.D.) in New Testament and Greek, I served for five years as the pastor of a thriving college-town church in the mountains of eastern Kentucky. That challenge prompted a spurt of growth and deepened me as a person. In other words, it was an experience of Christian formation.

When my alma mater, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, invited me back to join the tenured faculty, another process of deepening and formation began. It amazes me in retrospect how my competence in the discipline went to another level. That was Christian education of a sort. But, beyond that, relating to students and colleagues, facing the challenge of having a formative influence on divinity students, and dealing with the spiritual and missional implications of the material I was teaching changed and deepened me in ways I still am unpacking.

The term Christian formation gets at this dual aspect of growth in a way that the term Christian education does not. Formation certainly involves education and study. But, that education and study has a purpose—to form us more fully into Christ's image. Mere reading and study without that outcome may be educational but it will not be formation.

May I offer you one example from the life of Christ Church? It is one thing to study Christ's teaching about caring for the poor and marginalized. It's another thing entirely to participate in the building of a Habitat House and sharing the joy of the family whose house that becomes. That engagement interweaves you with others and it can deepen your compassion and lead you to an altered perspective about the poor.

Peace,

David W. Perkins+
Interim Rector